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General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

6th meeting
Friday, 8 June 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-25/4/Add.1)

The President: In a letter contained in document A/S-25/4/Add.1, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/S-25/4, Haiti and Vanuatu have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in that document?

It was so decided.

Agenda items 8, 9 and 10 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General (A/S-25/3 and Add.1)

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tony Kandiero, Chairman of the delegation of Malawi.

Mr. Kandiero (Malawi): I consider it a very great honour indeed, and a rare privilege, to lead Malawi's delegation to this very important special session and to be given the opportunity to address such a distinguished group of representatives. Please allow me, Mr. President, to convey to you very best wishes for the success of this special session from the President of the Republic of Malawi, His Excellency Mr. Bakili Muluzi. It is with a deep sense of pleasure that, on behalf of my delegation and of the Government of the Republic of Malawi, I congratulate you on your election to steer our deliberations. Let me also pay tribute to the Secretariat for the excellent arrangements made to organize this session. My delegation and I have no doubt that with these excellent arrangements, and under your able leadership, Sir, we shall achieve fruitful and meaningful results.

It is five years since the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. Here we are in New York at a special session which offers opportunities to review our accomplishments and our challenges. Also, we have an opportunity to reach consensus on forward-looking strategies for the realization of our objectives in shelter and human settlements development.

For Malawi, the session has afforded us the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries, and to take stock of our own achievements, failures and constraints in the implementation of our national plan of action and the Habitat Agenda since we last met.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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Since Istanbul, Malawi has undertaken many activities and initiatives to improve human settlements. Among these are, first, the merger in 1997 of the former Ministries of Lands and Valuation, Housing and Physical Planning and Surveys and the Department of Buildings. That merger has enhanced our opportunities to ensure efficiency and to carry out effectively our programmes in the sphere of human settlements development.

Second, we have formulated a national housing policy, which benefited immensely from the Habitat Agenda.

Third, we have formulated a national land policy that aims at fostering a more economically efficient, environmentally sustainable and socially equitable land tenure system.

Fourth, we have formulated a national environment policy and enacted an environmental management act; these guide the review of sector policies in order to make them consistent with sustainable environmental management principles.

Fifth, we have formulated a decentralization policy and have enacted a new local government act; these devolve wide-ranging powers of local governance and development to elected local government councils, which we call assemblies. The policy also advocates well coordinated participatory methodologies in which the State, the private sector and civil society organize themselves to explore grass-roots solutions to poverty alleviation and sustainable human settlement development.

Sixth, we have revised an inheritance act, which protects widows from relatives of deceased husbands bent on grabbing property.

Seventh, we have implemented Local Agenda 21 in our two major cities of Blantyre, the commercial centre, and Lilongwe, the capital city, along the lines of the sustainable livelihoods approach. I am delighted that the mayors of both those cities are amongst my delegation.

Eighth, we have launched our enterprise development and employment creation programme, which aims at ensuring that the desperately poor, especially women in rural and urban areas, are identified and assisted in establishing adequate capacities, structures, means and incomes to meet their basic requirements.

Ninth, we have enacted a privatization act geared towards increasing efficiency, enhancing competition, reducing monopolies and promoting and expanding Malawi business ownership.

And tenth, we have launched a poverty alleviation programme, which is the linchpin of Malawi's development policy; its objectives are to raise the productivity of the poor and increase income and employment opportunities for all vulnerable groups.

Despite those achievements and initiatives, Malawi continues to face serious major challenges. More than 60 per cent of our population lives below the poverty line.

This lingering high incidence of poverty has been compounded by unfavourable economic conditions inside and outside our country, as well as by a lack of capacity in human, technical and financial resources. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of international support. Unless and until international declarations translate into actual international support, most of our plans will remain dreams.

However, Malawi's commitment to the Habitat Agenda and its implementation is total and unwavering. Malawi will support the declaration and other outcomes of this special session, because we believe that the Habitat Agenda and the outcome of this session provide the correct vision for improving human settlements and the quality of life of our respective citizens. We are ready to work with all willing partners in our common struggle to turn this vision into reality.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Blaise Ouo Foromo, Minister of Town Planning and Habitat of Guinea.

Mr. Foromo (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): I would like to convey to you, Sir, my delegation's sincere congratulations on your brilliant election as President of the current session. I also wish to extend congratulations to the other members of the Bureau, under whose guidance the future of the Habitat sector is going to take shape. I am convinced that, with your far-sighted leadership, this special session will produce results which will respond to the hopes it has generated among our peoples.

His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea, and his Government believe that this meeting is an opportunity to be taken

advantage of, to expand the progress made and to correct the weaknesses found in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This summit, therefore, represents the legitimate hopes of all of humanity aspiring to sustainable development within its life's framework.

The African continent is particularly concerned about the serious deterioration in terms of trade and living conditions resulting from the critical economic situation and the adverse effects of factors that are acting in combination and have proven difficult to master, including the population explosion, exacerbated and accelerated urbanization and armed conflicts.

The crisis which has resulted from this process has not spared my country, where people today aspire more than ever before to live in safe, equitable and sustainable settlements that are conducive to their integral fulfilment in a movement towards participation in the urban economy. Accordingly, the Guinean authorities have done everything possible to ensure that the representatives of our country are present at all of the major meetings which have been part of the preparatory phase for the present session. The Consultative Committee of Habitat II, established by my Government in the context of following up the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, organized broad consultation among all actors concerned with the improvement and modernization of human settlements. A national evaluation report was prepared for this purpose and was confirmed during the workshop.

Among the results obtained, one can note the following: the efforts to provide secure accommodation following the promulgation of the Land Code in 1992; the guarantee of equal access to land; a dynamic partnership between the private and public sectors, non-governmental organizations and communities, which has led to the implementation of major development projects; access to essential services, in urban as well as in rural areas; the promotion of decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities; and social integration and assistance to underprivileged groups, particularly women.

The main efforts of the Guinean Government are currently directed towards actions favouring the implementation of policies guaranteeing the development of the habitat sector in Guinea, with the assistance of the international community.

Putting these policies into practice will enable the Guinean Government to direct its development efforts towards participatory approaches, which, inter alia, will make the following changes possible: promoting the involvement of non-governmental organizations and civil society in development of the habitat sector; pursuing efforts undertaken in the context of assistance to groups at risk and women; facilitating access to land and guaranteeing further secure tenure; strengthening the partnership between public, private and community sectors for their development; promoting decentralization; and strengthening local authorities and international cooperation.

These are but a few of the priority activities already undertaken, and we propose to make these even more dynamic in the coming years in order to deal with urban crises and the main difficulties facing the urban economies, which is a very serious problem in our countries. Added to these priority activities are emergency actions, such as the reconstruction of stricken areas following the aggression against our country along its southern borders with Liberia and Sierra Leone over the past 10 months.

The Guinean Government is more determined than ever to go beyond the results already achieved in order to respond to the ever-growing aspirations of our people. In this perspective, and from that of Habitat II, my Government is firmly committed to promoting all forms and levels of partnership necessary for the mobilization of resources and essential investment.

The United Nations has made many efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the various problems of habitat. However, the people of non-industrialized countries continue sliding into poverty, misery and precarious situations. This special session should take into account the great changes of the third millennium in order to make the international community more aware, so that the development of habitat can be recognized as a necessary transition period for all attempts to revitalize the economy.

It is important to specify that the challenge of the third millennium should be the redeployment of economic, financial, technical and human data so that habitat's problems may be resolved in a lasting way, thanks to a dynamic and effective partnership and the assistance of the international financial community.

Our mission, that of the States of the United Nations family, is to adopt specific resolutions and to

make a firm political commitment to carrying them out. For our part, I can confirm my country's commitment to respect and apply all of the recommendations adopted at this twenty-fifth special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I wish to conclude by asking the Assembly to join in the warm congratulations that the Guinean Government wants to express to all of the eminent personalities present here for their participation in the success of this meeting.

Lastly, I wish to express sincere gratitude and profound thanks from the Republic of Guinea to the Preparatory Committee of this twenty-fifth special session for the hospitality given its delegation.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. André Tsala Messi, Secretary of State of Cameroon for Town Planning and Housing, in charge of Land, Registration and Surveys.

Mr. Tsala Messi (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): It is a great honour and privilege for me to take the floor at this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly on behalf of the head of State, His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, and of the Government of the Republic of Cameroon.

Allow me to ask you, Sir, to convey to the Secretary-General the satisfaction of the President of the Republic of Cameroon with the efforts made and action undertaken to cope with the economic, social and environmental consequences of rapid urbanization, as well as to improve living conditions throughout the world. Allow me to extend to you, as well as to the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the congratulations of the delegation of Cameroon on the excellent organization and flawless direction of our work and the quality of the documents that have been provided.

Cameroon is gratified, on the one hand, to have made a significant contribution to the preparatory process for the Habitat II Conference, and, on the other hand, to have actively participated during all the preparatory phases of the current special session of the General Assembly.

Despite an economic recession, our country has dedicated itself to implementing the Habitat Agenda through a set of policies, programmes and projects involving institutional, economic and social reforms, as well as through the establishment of an urban, environmental and managerial development strategy. This work includes, inter alia: the national anti-poverty programme, the urban strategy declaration, the national environmental management and protection plan, the national governance programme and the national health, fertility and nutrition programme.

Here I would like to thank Habitat, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, as well as all the agencies engaged in bilateral and multilateral cooperation, for their valuable assistance to the work that has already been carried out in implementing these programmes.

The adoption of the millennium declaration on cities and other human settlements at the end of this special session will send a strong signal prompting all Governments to implement effectively the Habitat Agenda, at the local, regional and national levels. This is why Cameroon — while in solidarity with the African position taken during the regional ministerial conference held in Addis Ababa — hopes that the spirit of Istanbul will reign during the consideration of the draft of the declaration that we are going to adopt. This declaration should include the following: the effective contribution by the developed countries of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to development assistance and the strengthening of international community support for the efforts to combat poverty and HIV/AIDS. It should also cover the establishment of an intergovernmental forum to discuss the guidelines for a local-autonomy charter that would provide an international framework for guiding national legislative reforms aimed at establishing an effective decentralization policy that takes into account the specific characteristics of each State. The declaration should also promote an ethic of international solidarity for dealing with the debts of poor countries. Such an approach was advocated by His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, in his statement at the Millennium Summit on 7 September 2000, here in New York.

In order to achieve the objectives defined in the Habitat Agenda — "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world" — it would be highly desirable if the production of community housing, the rehabilitation of squatter districts and the provision of social services were integrated into the international anti-poverty initiative.

In conclusion I would like to wish our work every success. I am convinced that it will lead to the adoption of specific measures and initiatives to overcome the obstacles that have been encountered in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda since the Istanbul Conference.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Laurent Nkusi, Minister of Lands, Human Resettlement and Environmental Protection of Rwanda.

Mr. Nkusi (Rwanda): On behalf of the Rwandan delegation, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to chair this important conference. Indeed it is a privilege for me and members of my delegation to address this session.

Five years ago nations gathered in Istanbul to address two themes of equal global importance, that is, adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. As you are aware, the Istanbul Conference took place when our country was emerging from genocide, the worst of its kind in the last millennium. While the whole world watched, the periodic massacres that culminated in the 1994 genocide not only led to the killing of 1 million Rwandan, but also resulted in the total destruction of the socio-economic infrastructure. This tragedy seriously disrupted the whole shelter and human-settlements sector. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the international community for its continuing support to my Government's rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

The plan of action that was established in Istanbul required nations to review policies and implement programmes to ensure adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. Our country has made some progress in this respect. Allow me to highlight some of the major achievements of the Government of National Unity in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The central areas of focus are shelter, social development and the eradication of poverty, environmental management, economic development, governance and international cooperation.

In 1996, my Government adopted the national human settlements policy. The underlying rationale of this policy is to transform the rural scattered settlement pattern into grouped settlements — *Imidugudu* — with the primary purpose of ensuring optimal land use, the cost-effective provision of social infrastructure, security, national unity and reconciliation. In the urban areas the objective is to ensure that construction is carried out only in the surveyed plots and to upgrade slums and squatter areas. A ministerial decree was released in January 1997 to spell out this policy.

In the last five years, the Government has constructed about 177,000 low-cost housing units for the rural poor with financial and technical support from the international community, including the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, and with the participation of beneficiaries. While my Government gratefully acknowledges this support, I would like to inform the Assembly that today in Rwanda, there are still about 2 million people — close to 370,000 families — living in makeshift structures, often made only of plastic sheeting.

This is the part of Rwandan population that was not supported by the shelter programme operations of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations. My Government reiterates that it was premature for UNHCR to phase out when returnees were still coming from neighbouring countries.

In addition, the housing programmes that were implemented responded to emergency situations and carried out life-saving activities, such as providing shelter, food and so on, and, therefore, many settlement sites lack basic infrastructures. The provision of basic infrastructures in this area is therefore very important in order to ensure its sustainability.

Regarding security of tenure, our country is in the process of reviewing its land policy and law to ensure equitable land ownership and management.

In the areas of social development and eradication of poverty, the main developments includes cross-subsidization of social services.

Regarding economic development, the fact that 60 per cent of the Rwandan population lives under the poverty line has prompted our Government to undertake major economic policy reforms.

Turning to environmental management, we recognize the reality that the environment is a critical cross-cutting issue in all human settlements programmes.

Significant advances have been made in the area of governance, including constitutional reviews

designed to institute decentralized systems of governance and policies to increase citizen participation and public-private partnerships in the delivery of services.

Last year, cell and sector local-level elections created committees which increased peoples' participation in the decision-making process. National elections will follow after the transition period in 2003.

As far as international cooperation is concerned, my country is encouraged by the warm cooperation we enjoy with the different nations represented here and all our development partners.

The Government of National Unity and the people of Rwanda recognize that development can take place only in an atmosphere of peace and stability in our country and region and in the world at large. Rwanda fully supports the peaceful resolution of conflicts and all mechanisms that support conflict prevention. It is in this respect that the Government of Rwanda is convinced that the successful implementation of the Lusaka Peace Agreement forms the only basis for sustainable peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

The threat to peace and security caused by the circulation of Interahamwe militia and the former Rwandan armed forces in the region cannot continue to be ignored. There cannot be any sustainable settlement without peace and security.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Mohammad Al-Sarawi, Chairman of the Board and Director General, The Environment Public Authority of Kuwait.

Mr. Al-Sarawi (Kuwait) *(spoke in Arabic)*: At the outset, Sir, I should like to congratulate you on your election to preside over this special session of the General Assembly. We are convinced that thanks to your wisdom and skill, the work of the session will be crowned with success. I should like also to pay tribute to the efforts made by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements during the preparatory phase of this important session.

This session has particular significance, as it is being held five years after the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul in June 1996. Clearly, five years is enough time to be able to undertake an objective assessment and a comprehensive consideration of the progress made and of the obstacles that have hampered the implementation of the objectives of the international community aimed at creating an appropriate environment for the inhabitants and populations of the world.

In this context, I should briefly like to speak to the efforts made by the Government of Kuwait, which are compatible and consonant with the resolutions of the Istanbul Conference.

First of all, in the area of housing, the Constitution of Kuwait guarantees in many of its articles the right of each citizen to adequate shelter as well as to health care and education. In order to enable people to enjoy these rights, the State of Kuwait, since its independence, has been providing housing to citizens, in accordance with systematic planning that provides guarantees of adequate shelter; of all communal services and equipment in the area of health and education; and of infrastructures related to electricity, drinking water, water filtration, sewage and so on. All of this serves to create an appropriate environment and adequate living conditions.

The State has so far provided nearly 62,000 housing units to its citizens. Other Government projects, as well as joint projects with the public sector, are also under way in order to build more housing units to meet the needs of citizens.

The State, moreover, has been providing many services, too numerous to mention here due to time constraints. The most important is our system of social security, which guarantees assistance after retirement and enables older persons to have a dignified existence that allows them to fulfil their needs.

Secondly, in the area of the environment, the State of Kuwait attaches particular importance to urban planning policies. This was illustrated by the establishment in 1996 of the High Council for the Environment, which is chaired by the First Deputy Vice-Premier and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who was entrusted with finalizing the environmental policies and plans which are being implemented by the public authorities. That agency has elaborated a national strategy designed to deal with environmental problems and, most importantly, has carried out performance studies on the implications of human settlements for the environment, taking into account the nature of the land, in order to guarantee a life in conditions of safety for future generations.

This agency has also been entrusted with dealing with the serious environmental problems created by Iraqi aggression against the State of Kuwait in August 1990. The invading Iraqi forces perpetrated crimes against the marine environment, as they deliberately dumped enormous quantities of oil into the Gulf and carried out other environmental crimes, burning more than 700 oil wells, thus creating clouds of smoke and more than 320 lakes of oil that took a long time to drain. Dealing with these is a source of concern for Kuwait.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the United Nations and its specialized agencies for the technical and material assistance provided to Kuwait to help it cope with the consequences of these problems. Ten years after this aggression, Kuwait hopes that its demands for compensation, now being considered by the Compensation Commission, will be met so that these environmental problems can be solved.

The challenges we face in implementing the goals of the Istanbul Conference require significant effort. The deterioration of human settlements is illustrated by the acts of the Israeli authorities, who are violating United Nations resolutions, particularly the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, by creating new settlements, expanding existing ones, and by demolishing Palestinians' houses, confiscating their lands and blocking Palestinian territories — measures that helped create difficult economic and social conditions.

This is why we are asking the international community to exert all pressure necessary on the Israeli Government to force it to abide by United Nations resolutions and to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories and respect the bilateral agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority within the framework of the peace process.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that Kuwait will continue its efforts and initiatives to ensure respect for the Habitat Agenda. We hope that the international community and the international financial institutions will be able to complete their efforts in the new millennium to implement the Habitat Agenda, eradicating poverty, ensuring the availability of drinking water, health care and rehabilitated land and coping with the problems of human settlements, particularly in the developing countries.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdessalam Ould Mohamed Saleh, Commissioner for Human Rights, Poverty Eradication and Social Integration of Mauritania.

Mr. Saleh (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): The opportunity provided us today to discuss the progress made since Istanbul in implementing the Habitat Agenda is an important occasion for us all. Managing urban development, and particularly access to housing for the poorest people, are two significant problems faced by the developing countries.

These traditional challenges are compounded by others, such as globalization and the need to create competing cities that can advance economically and attract foreign investment. Within this framework, protection of the environment and reduction of inequality among cities become more urgent.

While the Istanbul programmes form a good basis for a national policy in the area of human settlements, we are forced today to re-evaluate our attitudes towards the problem of urbanization and poverty. In that context, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania reaffirms the need to implement the Habitat Agenda and hopes that this session will serve as a starting point for balanced urban development that takes into account the demands of combating poverty, integration of poorer classes and protection of the environment.

Mauritania has experienced a devastating drought, which has placed pressure on the collective infrastructure and the environment, creating significant areas of marginalized housing. To meet these challenges, the Government of Mauritania has implemented a set of programmes aimed at improving basic infrastructure and at ensuring that the poor benefit from social services and from decentralization. This policy has been able to reduce poverty. Urban development is considered one of the strategic elements for eliminating poverty by the year 2015. This plan was decided on by the Government of Mauritania and was developed by local authorities, non-governmental organizations and international institutions. An urban development programme to cover the next 10 years has been established based on an integrated approach that has four major objectives.

The first objective is to rebalance the urban structure in the country, put an end to marginalized housing, integrate poor neighbourhoods by creating

investment possibilities, establish urban planning, establish sanitary conditions and base urban development on new practices so that authorities can ensure the participation of the entire population in the decision-making process. All these factors will be supplemented by a professional training programme aimed at women and young unemployed individuals.

The integrated approach of the Government of Mauritania to urban development is based on the firm will of the President of the Republic to put an end to marginalized housing areas and to provide equal development opportunities for all the citizens of Mauritania. Based on our experience of the last few years, the Mauritanian policy is innovative and is focused on providing loans. The promising results of this experience will make it possible to put an end to marginalized housing areas throughout the country.

To conclude, allow me, on behalf of the Government of Mauritania, to express the hope that this twenty-fifth special session will mark a new beginning for international solidarity for the urban development and for implementing the objective of decent housing for every inhabitant of our planet.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Padilla Tonos, Chairman of the delegation of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Padilla Tonos (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Dominican Republic attaches great importance to this special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and to adopt additional measures aimed at overcoming obstacles in the implementation of the Agenda. Putting the topic of housing and human settlements on our national development agenda represents a great challenge for my country because of its impact on the quality of life and on poverty.

As the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) emphasizes, Latin America and the Caribbean is the most highly urbanized region in the developing world. Between 1950 and 1990, the population changed from predominantly rural to predominantly urban in nature, and this brought with it enormous social and economic problems that have made the exercise of democracy and good governance more difficult. These problems include the lack of housing, education, health care, transportation, security and basic services such as the provision of drinking water and energy. Such shortages can become tragic at times of natural disaster or when external events have a negative impact on the fragile economies of developing countries. Such is the case with the external debt, the increase in oil prices and the massive migration of thousands of dispossessed people who come from other areas seeking to find a better future than they have in their own lands.

My country has not been spared this phenomenon. A large part of the population is concentrated in cities and urban centres, creating in many of them so-called "poverty belts" and marginalized neighbourhoods which require a series of measures and efforts on the part of the authorities that, more often than not, exceed their capacity, and where each day poverty becomes greater.

Throughout the developing world, including in my country, poverty has very deep roots. Hundreds of thousands of people are very poor. Indigence is widespread in rural areas, but marginality and harsh poverty are also emerging in the main cities, where education, food, health care and housing — the basic infrastructure for survival — are in short supply. In some sectors there is no security and communities live in fear, shaken by the knowledge that civil safety mechanisms are weak and delinquency and criminality are increasing. Hundreds of men are unemployed, hundreds of thousands of children from humble homes have no school to go to, no books and no food, and hundreds of women are completely marginalized.

No other example so reveals the abysmal gap between speech that deceptively advocates modernization in this era of globalization and the reality in which the developing world lives, confronted with a huge social debt. The Dominican Government believes that paying off that social debt should be the primary objective of any serious and responsible Government — any Government that cannot accept injustice and extreme poverty.

That is why we are involved in an ambitious social programme aimed at combating poverty and improving the urban and rural environment, with special emphasis on constructing housing for people with few resources. That should help, if not to eliminate, at least to curb and limit the scope and the consequences of the problems, in keeping with the

individual and social rights of all Dominicans, as confirmed in the constitution of the Republic.

To attain these objectives, however, public and private efforts at the national level will not be enough; international cooperation is required. That is why the Dominican Republic attaches great importance to this special session of the General Assembly. We must urgently muster the necessary and sufficient political will to evaluate the measures adopted at Habitat II and to implement additional measures, understanding that the main purpose of this meeting is to try to resolve one of the problems that highlights to the greatest extent the difference between rich and poor and that starkly reveals the real situation of the underprivileged who aspire to enjoy adequate living conditions, which they deserve as human beings.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Don MacKay, Chairman of the delegation of New Zealand.

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): At last year's Millennium Summit, the Prime Minister committed New Zealand to a wide range of principles and development targets for the coming years, many of which are relevant to our meeting here today. These include the reaffirmation of the principles of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and specific time-bound goals on access to basic services, including health, education and safe drinking water. The Millennium Declaration also committed United Nations Members to seeking significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. The commitment of our leaders to these goals, along with the urgent need to address the effects of our rapidly increasing global population, makes this a timely moment to review progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda.

The core Habitat principles of sustainable development, good urban governance and adequate shelter for all currently underpin New Zealand Government policy. New Zealanders are for the most part well housed. We are a nation of home owners: over 70 per cent of all of New Zealand's permanent dwellings were owner-occupied in 1996. Problems of inadequate or overcrowded housing are infrequent and difficult to measure. Tenants and homeowners are protected by, and answerable to, a robust legislative framework. This establishes basic rights for tenants, and design standards for building adequacy, so as to meet health, sanitation and safety requirements.

Human settlements planning, management and development are effectively provided for by existing legislation, with clear and mutually agreed roles for central, regional and local levels of government. The New Zealand Government is committed to facilitating access to affordable and sustainable housing for people on low incomes and to providing appropriate housing for people with special needs, thereby contributing to the well-being of communities and individuals.

New Zealand is a country in which 85 per cent of the population lives in urban areas and towns. At the same time, we are heavily dependent on our rural economy for our ongoing prosperity. Given that complex and co-dependent relationship between our city-dwelling majority and our agrarian economic backbone, the Government is particularly concerned to preserve and enrich the linkages between our urban and rural settlements. In that respect, we are very pleased to endorse the call made at this special session by the Secretary-General for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda to be undertaken in a manner that is cognizant of the needs of rural communities.

New Zealand's recognition of the importance of its country settlements has led the Government, as part of its broader sustainable development approach, to review its policies in various key areas of relevance to habitat. Policy reviews are taking place in the areas of sustainable growth, transport, measurement of social development, environmental policy, waste management, energy efficiency and local government. Our review of local government legislation will seek to give local governments more clearly defined purpose and greater flexibility in terms of their activities, and to make them more accessible and more responsive to their local communities. Greater decentralization and encouragement of enhanced civic engagement are in fact key elements of current government policy in a number of areas, most recently provision of health services. Government officials are also currently giving thought to ways to ensure greater integration and coordination of efforts across the New Zealand Government, and among the Government, the private sector and civil society, in order to promote a sustainable development approach.

The Habitat Agenda is also of relevance to our wider region. At present, urban communities in the

Pacific region are not large in either relative or absolute global terms. However, with urban populations projected to grow by as much as 3.2 per cent annually over the next 30 years, that situation may change rapidly. Already, many of our development partners are beginning to experience problems associated with rapid urbanization, including growing pollution and income inequality, as well as increasing problems with access to adequate sanitation and clean water. Issues related to use and ownership of land also continue to pose challenges. We hope that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) will continue to consider the unique human settlements development challenges faced by many Pacific island countries, particularly in terms of their limited natural resources, their ecologies and their vulnerability to natural disasters.

For the Commission on Human Settlements to remain an effective and relevant organization, and for the Habitat Agenda to achieve its goals, both must have a strategic focus. The issue of human settlements development is potentially as broad as the experience of human development itself. Few topics on the development agenda do not potentially have salience for Habitat. However, it is only in a few areas, notably its strategic points of entry, that Habitat can claim comparative advantage over other agencies. To be a truly effective and credible advocate, it must concentrate on core areas of expertise, and must coordinate with other agencies to ensure that human settlements issues are mainstreamed into others' activities. The recent establishment of a Habitat task management system is a valuable step in this regard; we applaud efforts to maintain such strategic focus to date, and urge the Executive Director to continue to intensify them in the future.

As we approach next year's World Summit for Sustainable Development, increasing attention will be paid to all aspects of sustainable development, including human settlements. It will be important for Habitat to play a constructive role in preparations for that event, and for the results of this special session to feed into it effectively.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Husein Zivalj, Chairman of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Zivalj (Bosnia and Herzegovina): It is my privilege and honour, on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to address the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session. I am also pleased that a significant number of States Members of the United Nations are represented here at high level, which clearly demonstrates the willingness of world leaders to address the challenges in the area of human settlements throughout the world. The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also aware of the importance of this special session for the world as a whole. But on this occasion I would like to underline several points that are significant to us.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a place that has to deal with a large number of issues related to human settlements. For instance, during the 1992-1995 war, more than 2 million people were forced out of their homes; very often, entire towns and villages were forcefully emptied of almost all their inhabitants. Most of the housing units were burned or otherwise completely destroyed. As members will recall, a number of cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the capital, Sarajevo, were under siege for more than three years, and were exposed to continuous and indiscriminate shelling, with urban areas and infrastructure as deliberate targets. Apart from that physical destruction, the unique Bosnian social fabric of a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious society was also affected in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

So, when the war ended in November 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina was faced with human settlements that were in a disastrous state. In addition to that, some 3 million mines, planted indiscriminately and unmarked throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, still pose a very serious threat, especially to children. However, with the generous assistance of the international community, for which we are profoundly grateful, about a million refugees and internally displaced persons returned to their pre-war homes between 1995 and 2001. Regrettably, although pursuant to annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement each and every internally displaced person or refugee has the right to return to his or her home of origin, around 1.135 million internally displaced persons and refugees are still waiting to exercise that right.

Apart from security issues, other main obstacles to return include a lack of housing units, destroyed infrastructure, a lack of job opportunities due to the destruction of industrial facilities, a lack of schools and universities and poor communication networks. Those are challenges that Bosnia and Herzegovina, for

various reasons, cannot meet all by itself. However we offer our unreserved commitment and readiness to take on our full share of the responsibility in cooperating with the international community and in working with it towards our common goal: the restoration of the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious character of the human settlements that once adorned Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributing in that way to the richness of world heritage and committing ourselves to working with other nations towards achieving a prosperous and bright future.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ousmane Moutari, Chairman of the delegation of the Niger.

Mr. Moutari (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the delegation of my country, the Niger, at this special session of the General Assembly devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to inform the Assembly about its implementation in my country during the five years since the Istanbul Conference.

The national report prepared by the Niger recounts the current situation relating to habitat and human settlements in my country. Without going into all of the details contained in the report, I would like to tell the Assembly about some of the main activities that have been or are being carried out.

The most significant measure that my country has taken concerns the national habitat policy. Adopted in 1998, or two years after Istanbul, following an intensive process involving the public and private sectors, the national habitat policy of the Niger was built on the following six strategic pillars: first, general provisions; secondly, legislative and regulatory measures; thirdly, institutional measures; fourthly, habitat financing; fifthly, operational measures; and lastly, technology.

The first strategic pillar provides for the elaboration of a national housing plan. This plan is contained in the programme for the construction of 20,000 homes in the communes of the Niger, and we are currently seeking financing for this programme.

With regard to the second pillar, several legislative and regulatory measures have in fact been adopted, and activities are under way in that direction.

As regards institutional measures, the third strategic pillar, the restructuring of financial institutions is currently under way, and this has already made it possible to establish a Habitat Bank and an account for the mobilization of resources to support Habitat.

As for the other three pillars, their implementation is being impeded by the extreme weakness of the State's capacities, so the financial and technical support of the international community is more necessary than ever before. This is why my country is requesting the assistance of its development partners to ensure the total success of its habitat policy, in particular that of the International Development Association (IDA), which at present is supporting us in the area of planning human settlements through, inter alia, a project for the rehabilitation of urban infrastructures.

Five years ago, in the context of the medium-term action plan 1996-2000, contained in the Niger's national report for Habitat II, the production and land management aspect of the plan was devoted to spatial planning for the Niger's cities. The objective of this first programme is to design a simple urban planning tool and to test it in some of the Niger's cities. We are very happy already with the results of this important programme, which we have been able to carry out thanks to the invaluable assistance of the IDA.

The second programme, concerning the strengthening of legislation and regulations governing urbanization and construction, is in the process of being carried out, like most of the programmes in our plan of action. Again, this is an ongoing process, and a number of texts have been adopted and are being implemented.

All of the programmes under the first heading — production and land management — and the second — production of suitable housing — contain various elements that links them to the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, launched by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Moreover, the Niger has taken into account the question of secure tenure through a vast project to distribute land parcels to some 20,000 civil servants, which should benefit about 120,000 individuals.

In the Niger, the question of financing for Habitat is of utmost concern, taking into account the huge needs in terms of housing — some 40,000 units per

year — and the weakness of our responses due to our very limited resources. This is why my delegation believes that it is essential to create, in the context of the United Nations system, a fund to finance the Habitat Agenda.

Indeed, we must not forget that the Millennium Summit decided to accomplish by the year 2020 the goal of improving appreciably the lives of at least 100,000 inhabitants of shanty towns, in accordance with the Cities without Slums initiative. To do this, the question of financing requires special attention from the international community.

In the Niger, even though strictly speaking we do not have shanty towns, we do have unplanned settlements that include slums, generally in old neighbourhoods or villages that have been overtaken by urbanizaton. The Niger has attacked the problem through the restructuring of old neighbourhoods — for example, the Gamkallé neighbourhood in the capital, Niamey — and a study has been completed in this respect. The problem of financing operations in the field has not yet been resolved, and a request in this connection will be addressed to organizations of the United Nations system.

With regard to rural settlements, a project called "Special programme 2001", initiated by Mr. Tandja Mamadou, President of the Republic, is being carried out. The goal of the project is to equip the Niger's villages with 1,000 health centres, 1,000 wells and 100 dams per year in order to improve the living conditions of rural populations and enable them to increase production.

The debt burden of the least developed countries, such as that of the Niger, constitutes a major handicap in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This debt should be cancelled, and the resources devoted to it should be redirected towards a better implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which is an essential factor for reducing poverty.

Finally, I would like to appeal for the strengthening of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. In addition to its traditional role, we believe that the Centre should be placed at the vanguard of combating poverty. It should be given appropriate resources so that it can help the developing countries implement effectively the Habitat Agenda.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Monsignor Francis Chullikatt, Chairman of the observer delegation of the Holy See.

Monsignor Chullikatt (The Holy See): Five years ago this month, the United Nations met in Istanbul for the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. The Holy See recognized the importance of that meeting, especially regarding the realization of the right to adequate shelter for all persons, all families, along with a better understanding of the inseparable connection between sustainable development and human settlements development. With the current meeting, we bring to a close the five-year review cycle of those United Nations Conferences and summits that have had such a profound effect on our understanding of sustainable human development, not only as regards the work of this Organization, but also the world community at large.

What have we learned? And what will be the legacy that this and all of those meetings will leave to the United Nations?

To answer those questions, we must turn to the very first principle of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, the principle that has guided our work for so many years and which states emphatically that human beings are at the centre of our concerns for sustainable development. In fact, the fundamental global community is the human family itself.

We are reminded that human beings — every woman, man and child, living today and who will be born tomorrow, who constitute the family — are and must always be considered the subject of our work. Indeed, it is in the central interest and well-being of the family, through the establishment of adequate shelter for all, that we have gathered to discuss the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Again, it is towards the family that our attention is focused — to families living in the largest cities and to those in the most remote hamlet or village, in every place that people call home.

The Holy See looks forward to the adoption of the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium during this special session of the General Assembly. By this declaration, representatives will reaffirm their commitment to recognize the important role of the family as the basic unit of society, to eradicate poverty, to safeguard the environment, to

respect human dignity and to promote and protect human rights.

However, the success of this special session cannot overshadow the fact that so many people remain homeless, or that — as victims of armed conflict, natural disaster or economic turmoil — they have been forced from their homes, their livelihoods and in many cases separated from their families. So many people live in absolute poverty and without access to basic social services such as clean water, safe sanitation, education, health care and adequate nutrition — things that are necessary for life and the realization of human potential.

This special session must spark a renewal of the world's commitment to a solidarity that recognizes the benefits that come from a realization of the common good and a concern for the dignity of each member of the human family.

The United Nations has come a long way since Vancouver. And regarding so many issues, including human settlements development, there is still much to accomplish. Let us hope that a good and promising beginning will come as a result of the work of this special session.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Ulrich Bohner, Deputy Head of the Secretariat of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Bohner (Council of Europe): I am particularly honoured to speak on behalf of Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at this special session of the General Assembly. I should like to take this opportunity to present a short overview of the main achievements of the Council of Europe in the field of local democracy over the past 50 years.

The major achievement of the Council of Europe for drawing up a set of common principles of local self-government all over Europe was the adoption in 1985 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, an international convention which has been signed and ratified respectively by 37 and 34 countries out of the total of 43 member States of the Council of Europe.

Since 1994 local and regional authorities in Europe have been represented in the Council of Europe by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, which took over from the previous Standing Conference. Today this entity gathers some 600 delegates from the 43 member States and is the broadest official forum in Europe for discussion of the issues of local and regional democracy.

In recent years, signing and ratification of the Charter of Local Self-Government has become one of the major conditions of accession for the countries that wish to join the Council of Europe. The main purpose of this convention is, first of all, to provide member States with a common basis of shared values in the field of local democracy which every national Government and local authority can refer to in building or reforming their institutions. By signing and ratifying the European Charter, national Governments recognize the vital contribution of local self-government to democracy, democratic stability, effective administration close to the citizens and the decentralization of power aimed at rationalizing the decision-making process, as well as to giving citizens the opportunity to participate in public life.

In order to allow local authorities, as per article 3, to manage "a substantial share of public affairs", the European Charter provides for a number of principles which must be respected by the member States of the Council of Europe. The Charter also defines what may be called the structural conditions of self-government: the existence of councils elected by direct suffrage, executive organs responsible to those councils, the direct participation of citizens in public affairs and, of course, the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the division of powers and responsibilities between different tiers of government.

Mr. Lelong (Haiti), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The latter principle is laid down in article 4.3 of the Charter:

> "Public responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen."

The great merit of this principle lies in the fact that it enables elected bodies at the local level to discharge their responsibilities in close proximity to the people they serve, whose needs they know perfectly well, and that it gives them full freedom of decision, provided they respect decisions applying to the country as a whole. Local populations will be respected,

because the population controls democratically elected local authorities.

These provisions of the Charter have the merit of being adaptable to very different situations. The Charter should be seen as a means of encouraging States to develop their legislation in order eventually to guarantee their citizens the right to participate in the management of public affairs.

In the early 1990s, after the fall of communist governments in Central and Eastern European countries, the European Charter of Local Self-Government has been the legal instrument which has inspired eastern European Governments in their reform of local administration and supplied them with an institutional framework for such reforms. Joining the Charter has now become one of the key conditions of accession to the Council of Europe.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe instructed the Congress to prepare, on a regular basis, country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all Member States and ensure that the principles of the European Charter are implemented. So far, 30 country reports on local and regional democracy have been prepared and adopted by the Congress.

Over the past years, the Congress has followed with great interest the work of the United Nations Commission for Human Settlements relating to the preparation of a draft world charter on local self-government. Unfortunately, the Congress ascertained that the draft has encountered a number of difficulties and that progress is not as fast as would have been hoped.

However, the Congress expressed the view that it was important to continue to support — in conformity with the objectives of the Council of Europe — the ongoing worldwide dialogue on the principle of subsidiarity and good governance at the local level.

Our work on urban questions takes very much of its flavour both from the inspiration of the forces behind our work on local democracy, the European Charter of Local Self-Government; and from the overall vocation of a Council of Europe wedded to the principles of democracy and human rights. As Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, pointed out at the last Congress session, "There is no democracy without local democracy".

One of the key instruments of the Council of Europe in the field of good governance is the European Urban Charter. The Charter is the result of many years of work on urban questions at the Council of Europe — work which concentrated on some of the aspects I have already mentioned. Inspired by one of our campaigns, the European Campaign for Urban Renaissance, and characterized by comparative reports, conferences, seminars, exchange of best practices and policy proposals, the Charter is both a distillation of this work and a guide by local authorities for local authorities on good urban practice and on good governance.

In conclusion, I would like to affirm the coincidence of the objectives of both of the Habitat Agenda and our own work on the challenges of town and country planning in Europe. We naturally, therefore, support the Habitat Agenda. Equally, we support the work of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements and its work on preparing a draft world charter of local self-government. In this context, last week in Strasbourg, on the occasion of the plenary session of our Chamber of Local Authorities, we spoke at length to delegations from local authorities from China and from the United States of America. We hope that their influence will be brought to bear on their respective national authorities in order to dilute their opposition to the Charter. In our own geopolitical zone, we have received commitments from member countries of the Council of Europe to support the Charter.

We are, in general, supportive of the strengthening of the local government dimension in the work of the United Nations, in a way similar to the one we enjoy in the Council of Europe with our Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the European Union with its Committee of Regions, and also through the World Association of Cities and Local Authorities.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Dame Veronica Sutherland, Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Dame Veronica Sutherland (Commonwealth Secretariat): My statement is made on behalf of the member countries of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements.

The Commonwealth reaffirms its commitment to the Habitat Agenda and continues to work actively

towards implementation of its broad objectives in member States.

To facilitate this process and deepen its involvement, Commonwealth Governments agreed to the establishment of a Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) to help develop a consensus Commonwealth approach for implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The Commonwealth secretariat is partnered in this effort by the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

The CCGHS has developed a Commonwealth Input to Istanbul + 5 outlining a consensus approach to assist member Governments to implement the Habitat Agenda. The full text of this Input has been circulated in a separate document.

The CCGHS has adopted a new Commonwealth goal, which is the focus of all its activities and programmes. That goal is "Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015".

To achieve this goal, the CCGHS has defined six major objectives: providing basic services to households, neighbourhoods and villages; incorporating the provision of shelter into national poverty-alleviation programmes; espousing a Commonwealth position on corruption; removing systematic discrimination against women, especially in respect of title to property and inheritance rights; promoting security of tenure and good governance; and promoting the attainment of the new Commonwealth goal.

In the light of these objectives, the CCGHS has identified five broad areas for action, as follows.

The first area is the development of partnerships. Good governance requires the closest working relationships between Governments, civil society and the private sector. Such partnerships are seen as crucial to success. Failure to develop these partnerships could condemn well-conceived programmes to failure.

Secondly is the identification of new and innovative resources, and the more effective use of existing funds. An important function of the CCGHS will be identification of relevant sources of financial project support. At the request of national Governments, the CCGHS will provide guidance and information in developing project proposals for submission to the relevant agencies.

The third area is promoting the sharing of ideas, experience and lessons learned. The success or failure of individual projects provides a rich source of experience, and can considerably shorten the learning curve. An important part of the CCGHS's activity will be to facilitate the free exchange of ideas, knowledge, experience, best practices and failures.

South-South networking will be given prominent attention. The exchange of experts between developing countries for hands-on assistance and training has great potential and will be a particular focus of the CCGHS as a fruitful method of knowledge networking.

The fourth area relates to capacity-building and country reports. The UNCHS advocates that each country produce a country report on the conditions, key issues, programmes initiated and results achieved since 1996, in order to assist future action and address future challenges. The CCGHS initiative will respond to requests for assistance in preparing such reports.

The fifth area is promoting good governance and security of tenure. The CCGHS will actively support the UNCHS global campaigns on good governance, which is essential to establishing norms of local governance and secure tenure, which is key to finance for shelter development and land administration.

Over the next few years, the CCGHS Work Plan will focus on the areas previously outlined for priority action and seek to measure achievement against the newly adopted Commonwealth goal up to 2006.

Assessments will embrace a range of topics, including shelter units constructed, improved security of tenure, increased access to essential services, improvements in governance, progress in enhancing women's rights to tenure and inheritance, improved credit facilities and credit availability to the poor, increased knowledge and experience exchange between countries, improved partnership relations in number and quality and enhanced support for capacity-building.

The goal of adequate shelter for all by 2015 is one of the most challenging social problems facing the present generation. Given the resilience and cohesion of the Commonwealth, and the previous success of

action taken in unison, we believe that this goal is achievable.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mr. Dion Swinkels, representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Swinkels (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) approaches this special session of the General Assembly with a number of profound concerns. In our view, although there has been much good work done by Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations since Istanbul, there are also areas of activity that continue to fall behind.

The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, which was adopted at the same time, carried the promise of real energy aimed at redressing what was identified by heads of Government as the continuing deterioration of conditions of shelter and human settlements. A detailed agenda of commitments and undertakings followed, but now, we must ask ourselves whether much has changed.

The perspective of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is enriched by the observations, experiences and reports of over 180 member and observer National Societies, participating with us and the International Committee of the Red Cross in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

We have been assisted in this work by the recognition the 1996 Habitat Agenda gave to disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness. Paragraph 176 (l) of the Agenda specifically invited Governments at all levels to,

> "Recognize, support and facilitate the role of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their member national societies in disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response at the local, national and international levels".

I will not dwell on what has happened since the adoption of this paragraph, except to observe that the response has been patchy. While our Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are well recognized for their role in disaster preparedness and response, and in other fields directly related to disaster itself, there has been less understanding of the part disaster preparedness must play in the setting of housing and construction standards.

The International Federation, through the very nature of its work, finds itself working wherever the world experiences disaster. We have accumulated a great deal of experience of the good and the bad in our 82 years of work in this field.

It was against this background that a chapter appeared in the *2000 World Disaster Report* on international disaster response law, following the announcement of the President of the International Federation, Ms. Astrid Heiberg, in her speech to the General Assembly, in New York on 27 November 2000, that the Federation was launching this initiative and analysing the present state of international law in the field of disaster preparedness and response. That chapter, which was written by an expert from the American Red Cross, drew a strong and favourable response from the international community.

The positive response was noted by the International Federation's Governing Board at its meeting in November 2000, and a group of experts was convened to discuss the issues.

The outcome of the meeting was an affirmation that the study of international disaster response law needs to be strengthened, and, further, that the International Federation should use its position as an international organization to bring this work to the attention of States as well as to the civil society groupings with which it has such valuable contacts.

This venue, the special session of the General Assembly on human settlements, is a most appropriate one for informing States of the work now under way on international disaster response law. At the outset, we should state that it is the intention of the International Federation to integrate States into the study phases now about to begin. We are also most grateful for the support we have received from several parts of the United Nations system, especially the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The printed version of my intervention today will contain more information, but let me briefly summarize it. The international disaster response law study is about the need for a clear understanding of the legal framework within which disaster assistance is provided and used. This framework needs to take account of

national law as well as international law, both hard and soft, and of all practice at all levels. The scope of legal study has to be left open deliberately.

The experts who met in Geneva in February 2001 saw several issues as deserving of careful work. These include the need for laws and regulations to waive import-export and transit restrictions and duties for relief goods; waive overflight and landing restrictions and duties; grant landing rights; facilitate telecommunications in emergency situations; waive visa and other immigration restrictions; and provide for medical and other professional assistance directly benefiting disaster victims.

The time frame for this work has been designed around the value which would accrue to the exercise if it could be considered by States parties to the Geneva Conventions and their national societies at the International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent due to be held in Geneva in 2003. For this reason, the study phase should conclude with the publication of the collated legal and customary texts in mid-2002, allowing 12 months for further consultations and other work at regional and international levels.

We will also ensure that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in Nairobi is kept fully informed of this work as it proceeds. We would like Habitat and its network to be prime contributors to the exercise on international disaster response law. We also hope that the lessons we have to learn from the 2001 *World Disaster Report*, building on the chapter on the international disaster response law in the 2000 *World Disaster Report*, will galvanize States and civil society alike for the work that lies ahead.

The International Federation's regional and country delegations throughout the world, in cooperation with the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, will also be working actively as advocates for better responses to issues like housing and construction standards. With this in mind, we commit ourselves to continuing the work entrusted to us at Istanbul. Our mission in this respect is to mobilize the power of humanity for disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response at local, national and international levels.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ileana Echegoyen, Secretary of Housing of Puerto Rico.

Mrs. Echegoyen (Puerto Rico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I appreciate this opportunity to share with the Assembly today the challenges and the opportunities faced by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in the twenty-first century in the areas of housing, sustainable development and infrastructure. I wish to stress that although we have been absent from this forum in years past, we reaffirm our commitment to the Habitat Agenda.

The traditional centres of our cities have been losing population over the past 40 years due to suburbanization, thereby diffusing our development, despite the territorial limits of our island. This has significantly affected our natural resources and has raised housing construction costs because of the need to develop new infrastructure.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is committed to the Istanbul Declaration on sustainable development and to the need to minimize development's impact on our natural resources and ecosystems. We fully agree that cities are centres of civilization that generate economic, social, cultural and spiritual development. Puerto Rico has incentive programmes for the private sector to acquire and demolish abandoned structures, consolidate homes and plots of land in the urban centres of our cities and thus to revitalize them. The alliance with the private sector and local Governments is of vital importance in attaining the goal of saving our urban centres.

We also support the Istanbul Declaration with respect to human development and its vision of justice, which sets as one of its challenges that of expanding the supply of housing to include the neediest and the poorest, such as single mothers and the homeless. Our Government has focused its efforts on addressing the needs of the poorest communities through a programme for special communities, directed towards training community leaders so that, in improving infrastructure and housing, they can assume control of common spaces and create safe areas. This programme also coordinates residents and provides job-training so that, through self-employment or the development of microenterprises, they can contribute to the economies of their community and the country. In short, our housing programmes are directed not solely towards housing development, but also towards social development and improving the quality of life in our communities.

Our Government has decided to promote the construction and/or rehabilitation of 100,000 housing units over the next four years. Half of these units will be for low-income families or individuals who, without our assistance, would be unable to acquire housing.

Among the programmes to promote secure and accessible housing, we have developed, together with the private banking sector, a subsidy for mortgage interest that significantly reduces monthly payments. Another programme helps buyers with direct assistance of up to 21 per cent of the purchase price. In order to lower the costs of development of social value, we have reduced the taxes on and costs to the private sector. In addition, we have significantly reduced the income tax for developers of social housing projects.

These housing development efforts and community improvements, together with ambitious public transportation projects, will revitalize our cities and significantly increase their capacity for orderly growth, thereby avoiding the suburban sprawl that threatens our resources. For Puerto Rico, vibrant, safe and economically strong cities, with the broad participation of all sectors, are the key to preserving our rural areas, agricultural land and green infrastructure.

Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to share some of the strategies and activities that Puerto Rico is carrying out in order to meet the challenges of housing, sustainable development and infrastructure.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Carlyle Corbin, Minister of State for External Affairs of the United States Virgin Islands.

Mr. Corbin (United States Virgin Islands): It is my honour to represent the Government of the United States Virgin Islands at this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly. My delegation appreciates the continual support of Member States since 1992 in facilitating the participation of associate Governments members of regional economic commissions as observers to the United Nations world conferences and General Assembly special sessions, providing an opportunity for interaction with the international community on issues of relevance to our development process.

The convening of this special session coincides with the beginning of the annual hurricane season in the Atlantic/Caribbean region. This has become increasingly significant to the sustainability of the human settlements in small island countries such as our own, given the often devastating impact that many of these storms have had and continue to have on our countries. In this vein, a report of the Latin American and Caribbean regional Habitat preparatory conference, held in Chile last October, found that among the determinants of such natural disasters is their immediate impact on the quality and quantity of housing stock. The 1996 Habitat Agenda itself called for the development of

> "appropriate norms and by-laws for land-use, building and planning standards that are based on professionally established hazard and vulnerability assessments", (*A/CONF.165/14, para. 172 (a)*)

as well as for the development of disaster-resistant construction methods.

Consistent with the spirit of the Habitat Agenda, my Government has adopted legislation greatly strengthening our construction codes for public and private dwellings as part of a comprehensive mitigation programme following the destruction to our human settlements caused by hurricane Hugo in 1989 and by hurricanes Luis and Marilyn in 1995. Other Caribbean and Pacific countries have made similar adjustments. In 2000, we successfully completed a series of hazard-mitigation flood-control projects, as well as major road reconstruction, and have commenced construction on a new waste-water facility.

While we are still facing the economic and fiscal implications of undertaking such massive post-disaster reconstruction efforts, we are greatly encouraged by ongoing negotiations aimed at providing the economic relief necessary for us to regain our economic footing in the wake of successive major hurricanes. In this connection, my Government is in support of the provisions of the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, committing the international community to

> "improving prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response capacities ... in order to reduce the vulnerability of human settlements to natural and human-made disasters and to implement effective post-disaster programmes for the affected human settlements, aimed ... at meeting immediate needs, reducing future disaster risks and making

rebuilt human settlements accessible for all." (*A/S-25/2, para. 63*)

My Government also endorses the Santiago Declaration adopted last October, with specific emphasis on the provision recommending that international cooperation agencies should consider increasing their contributions to activities in the field of human settlements and that the United Nations and other international bodies should coordinate technical assistance initiatives at the regional and subregional levels with a view to supporting these countries in the implementation of the Latin American and Caribbean Plan of Action on Human Settlements. We would urge that the associate Governments members of the regional commissions be made eligible for such assistance.

Part 8 of the Habitat Agenda stresses the importance of the conservation and rehabilitation of the historical and cultural heritage of societies in a globalized world. In the implementation of this mandate, we are pleased to report that we entered into an agreement with the Kingdom of Denmark in 1999 on the preservation and repatriation of the extensive archives covering the period when our country was under Danish jurisdiction, and a second agreement earlier this year on cooperation between our respective museums. We express our gratitude to the Kingdom of Denmark for its support in this endeavour to restore a major part of our cultural patrimony.

Amid our substantial efforts at post-disaster recovery, my Government has always made it clear that the welfare of our people is paramount and that an adequate supply of housing is of the utmost importance. In this connection, we have embarked on a five-year community development programme to meet the medium- and long-term housing needs of our people, with the revitalization of existing housing stock and the construction of new single family units, all consistent with prevailing hurricane-resistant standards.

All of these efforts at the national level could be effectively neutralized, however, because of the increasing vulnerability of our islands to natural disasters, in particular hurricanes, which have become more frequent and intense as a result of climate change precipitated by excessive greenhouse gas emissions. We therefore fully support a holistic approach to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda by integrating the many important recommendations of Agenda 21 and the Barbados Programme of Action into our collective thinking. We therefore call on the international community, in the words of paragraph 23 of the Millennium Declaration, "to adopt in all our environmental actions a new ethic of conservation and stewardship". We urge that every effort be made to embark on the required reduction in greenhouse emissions as we approach the tenth anniversary of the Earth Summit.

The sustainability — indeed, the very viability — of human settlements, especially in the most vulnerable small island countries, will be determined in large measure by the level of implementation of these international commitments.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the decision taken at the 1st plenary meeting, on 6 June 2001, I now give the floor to Ms. Sharon Capeling-Alakija, Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers.

Ms. Capeling-Alakija (United Nations Volunteers): We are here today to discuss what has been achieved since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996. We have been hearing a lot of bad news, but I have some good news. The United Nations Volunteers Programme — the volunteer arm of the United Nations system — has embraced the urban challenge. Shortly after the Istanbul meeting, the United Nations Volunteers launched its Strategy 2000, which identified urban development as one of three priority areas. Five years on, in this, the International Year of Volunteers, we are pleased to be able to talk about concrete results. The United Nations Volunteers have worked to implement the Habitat Agenda by mobilizing volunteers, as well as by promoting and supporting different types of volunteerism in developing countries and in countries in transition.

Making cities work for people has become an even more critical part of our mission in recent years. Many people imagine that international volunteers spend their time in remote villages, and, indeed, many of them do. But many other United Nations Volunteers are also hard at work in cities and towns, especially inner cities and shanty towns.

I would like to provide some examples of United Nations Volunteers in action. In Tema, Ghana, United Nations Volunteers are helping local authorities to

improve the municipal tax system. With their value-added neutrality, trustworthiness and solidarity, the United Nations Volunteers serve as brokers, striving to build confidence between taxpayers and local officials in an effort to make the system work.

In several Caribbean island States, United Nations Volunteers specialists work in urban settings to prevent drug abuse and to treat addicts. Many United Nations Volunteers work with street children in cities around the world. In Viet Nam's Ho Chi Minh City, which has an estimated 10,000 street children, United Nations Volunteers, working together with the city's child welfare foundation, have set up Street Vision, an educational programme which gives children the chance to study drama, circus activities and photography, as well as to exhibit their work.

In Bulgaria, Guatemala, Nepal, the Palestinian territories and Uzbekistan, United Nations Volunteers with urban planning and architectural expertise have dedicated themselves to revitalizing parts of old cities by restoring buildings, streets and parks. These are but a few ways in which United Nations Volunteers are helping to address the problems of city-dwellers. Working daily in direct contact with local partners, United Nations Volunteers have proved themselves capable performers in long-term development efforts.

The role of a United Nations Volunteer carrying out these activities complements the initiatives of local volunteers. United Nations Volunteers are able to tap the United Nations system to bring fresh and rapid responses to emerging problems. Additionally, because of their perceived neutrality, United Nations Volunteers can sometimes help avoid local political pressures.

Obviously, we are not alone as city-conscious volunteers. Tens of thousands of volunteers work in urban areas, either through service organizations or spontaneously, to build latrines, improve sanitation, increase access to health care, prevent crime and give hope to teenage mothers and the unemployed. However through our contacts with our global partners, we have come to realize that very often people who help others do not regard themselves as volunteers. Indeed, many people, both in the North and the South, might not be aware of the various forms volunteerism takes in their home countries. They might not realize that volunteerism is, in fact, deeply embedded in all national cultures through traditions of caring and sharing, even if it is not formally recognized as volunteering. Volunteers — call them what we may — can be good neighbours who join in to dig wells, repair schools, fix roads or rebuild a home that was destroyed by fire. They help those in need in a spirit of self-help, trust and reciprocity.

Such reciprocal relationships are alive and well all over the world. In Rwanda, the word for this is *dufatanye;* in Kenya, it is *harambee;* in Bangladesh, it is *kela.* Mutual aid is present in other cultures as well: in the Andes, they speak of *minga;* in Finland, work for the common good of communities is called *talkoo.* On the other side of the globe, the Maori people of New Zealand call it *whanaungatanga.* What all this means is bringing people together to work like a family in villages, towns and cities.

While volunteerism is fundamental in human settlements, it is often overlooked as a resource. It is important to discuss ways to expand the role of volunteerism in urban development. Cities are shaped by the sum of the innumerable daily decisions, attitudes and behaviours of individuals and groups. Many of the maladies that currently plague urban areas could be eased or even eliminated if such decisions, attitudes and behaviours carried a greater degree of solidarity. Volunteerism can be instrumental in helping strengthen the norms of solidarity and reciprocity, which are so essential for stable communities. In short, volunteerism can build a foundation for the construction of caring cities.

All of us who are concerned about conditions in today's increasingly cramped urban areas would be well advised to pause and recognize volunteerism for what it is: the "V" in "development". We can acknowledge efforts like city-to-city projects as a form of volunteerism — one that allows ordinary people to become diplomats, advisers and learners. We know that when individuals who leave home to volunteer in other countries or cities eventually return, they bring with them new insights and skills. They strengthen their own communities not only by applying new competencies, but also by infusing their societies with the spirit of volunteerism.

In closing, I hope that the Assembly will permit me to use a marketing ploy. I would like to invite representatives to pick up a copy of a brand new publication that the United Nations Volunteers programme is releasing at this special session. It is called, appropriately, Caring Cities, and it is available

at the side of the General Assembly Hall. They will find in it a wide range of examples of what individual volunteers can accomplish. This paper gives the full story of what United Nations Volunteers have achieved to improve conditions in cities since Istanbul. We believe this story — the story of voluntary action, especially in this International Year of Volunteers — is well worth telling.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Litha Musyimi-Ogana, President of the African Centre for Empowerment, Gender and Advocacy.

Ms. Musyimi-Ogana (African Centre for Empowerment, Gender and Advocacy): I would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly and the other members of the Bureau for successfully steering this special session on Istanbul + 5 in an excellent manner. It will be five years this week since we participated in the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul, Turkey. With 100 million people in the world, most of them women, living with no shelter at all, with almost 70 million children living in the streets and with many millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, we still have a long way to go.

We are gathered here this week not only to take stock of the progress we have made since Istanbul and to evaluate how far we have gone in achieving the goals and objectives we set for ourselves at Istanbul, but also to share our experiences, best practices, achievements, lessons learned, problems encountered and gaps identified and to reflect on the obstacles that have faced us on the road from Istanbul. Five years into the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, we are now better positioned to map out ways in which we can accelerate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Confronted with new challenges and problems in Africa, such as increasing poverty, the HIV pandemic, the debt burden, globalization and poor rural infrastructure, among other issues, the attainment of the goals and objectives of the Habitat II conference will require renewed commitment. Furthermore, existing and new man-made disasters continue to make the goal of attaining adequate shelter a dream; this has serious negative effects on women and children. This review therefore affords us the opportunity in the twenty-first century to recommit ourselves to achieving the goals of the Habitat II conference.

I represent the African Centre for Empowerment, Gender and Advocacy, an organization which has been in the forefront of advocating gender parity in decision-making structures, which include parliaments and local authorities. The Centre has also been involved in monitoring the implementation of various United Nations instruments, such as the Habitat Agenda. It has identified five steps that can lead to the successful and systematic domestication and implementation of a United Nations instrument at the national level. We would like to share them with the Assembly. We believe that these steps can contribute to the accelerated implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The first is the formulation of new national policies or the review of old ones, accompanied by comprehensive national plans of action to implement those policies. We have found that national plans which prioritized their issues and that had clear goals, smart objectives, time-bound targets and financial resources were the most successful.

The second is participation of civil society and communities, in a gender-balanced manner, in United Nations processes, from the preparatory phase to the implementation phase.

The third is upgrading the focal point or the implementing machinery, both physically and technically, or creating a new framework where no such focal point exists.

The fourth is gender mainstreaming geared towards reducing gender disparity in existing structures and creating new gender-balanced institutions and processes.

Finally, we have found it necessary that specific budgetary allocations be made for the implementation of the priority issues of a particular instrument and their sustainability in a hostile macro-economic environment.

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) is now in a better position to guide Member States to build on some of the innovative strategies and best practices that have emerged from this review process in order to further push forward the Habitat Agenda. These include: local-to-local dialogue; decentralization of power to local levels where more women can participate; replicating best practices; adopting affirmative action measures; capacity building of communities and community-

based organizations; engendering governance and national budgets; advocacy interventions directed to multi-stakeholders; and campaigns such as the good governance, secure tenure and 50/50 by 2005 campaigns.

Resolution 55/194 made it possible for Habitat partners to participate in this process. I therefore cannot conclude my statement without thanking the President and the Assembly's membership for having adopted that resolution and encouraging them to continue enlarging the space for the participation of civil society at the United Nations. Dubbed the partners conference, Habitat II broke new ground in fostering new partnership among the United Nations family, Governments, local authorities, civil society and the private sector. Through that partnership, Habitat has been able to enjoy support from many of its partners, particularly those from civil society. We trust that this partnership will be further nurtured and sustained. I now take this opportunity to assure the Assembly of my organization's support for and commitment to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Ana Falu, Vice-President of the Habitat International Coalition.

Ms. Falu (Habitat International Coalition) (*spoke in Spanish*): Through me, the Habitat International Coalition wishes to speak on behalf of the social organizations that have been building cities, neighbourhoods and housing along with the capacity to resist the model that continues to asphyxiate the world's poor: the organizations of Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe. The first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held at Vancouver in 1976, set the theme of shelter and cities for the world. The international community agreed by consensus to revive the social production of shelter and identified the actors who would implement it. Those were years of controversy, years of dreams and of the building of a utopia of change.

Twenty years later, at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul, it was a time for sharing experiences and merging all that had been done, in all its complexity and unfulfilled promises. Through their struggle, non-governmental organizations and the breadth of social sectors that compose them — all the varied organized social groups, academia, local governments, labour unions and popular movements — attained a recognition that is today being challenged.

Now, at this special session to follow up on the commitments made by Governments, we are experiencing a major setback, reflected not only in the content and the weakened language of the central document before the Assembly, but also in the questioning of matters that had been discussed at length and on which consensus had been reached among all nations. This sets a dangerous precedent for the international community by excluding the voice of organized civil society and local government. It is we — those actors — who create cities and towns. This makes it hard for us to endorse the outcome of this session.

How can we describe these times? This is a world in which globalization, economic adjustment, the privatization of services and State withdrawal from social responsibility are having a greater effect on the critical condition of the poorest people, in a scenario dominated by market considerations, which have been given pride of place in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. These times seem to be marked by the cynicism of certain Governments — Governments whose own constitutions enshrine basic human rights; they speak of them before the General Assembly but make no progress in properly defending them. I mean the right to shelter, the right to access to cities, the right to secure tenure and the right to property and inheritance, which especially affects the world's women. Not to defend those basic rights in the international ambit is a major contradiction.

Nevertheless, social organizations, families and women in particular continue struggling to provide a response to things that should be social responsibilities assumed by the public policy of States.

However, there is good news. Some local governments have developed an active policy in this area.

We are facing critical situations. Let me give just a few examples. It should be emphasized that in today's world, there are 1.6 billion people living in precarious housing conditions, and it should be stressed that 70 per cent of these people are women. Millions of children live in the streets, and 1.7 billion people do not have drinking water.

That is not all. There are also forced evictions throughout the world, even though international recommendations from the United Nations recognize that such actions are violations of human rights.

Furthermore, tens of millions of people live in occupied territories; many others are displaced from their towns and cities for reasons of war, foreign occupation or simple speculation with respect to their land and their settlements, where their individual rights are not respected. All these situations involve human suffering, and they affect women and children in particular.

Given the deterioration of the urban and habitat situation, we have some proposals, and I will mention just a few. There is an urgent need to provide budgets that consider housing a necessity and a basic right on an equal footing with health and education. We need transparent subsidy policies. The subsidy could become a regulatory instrument to address the unequal distribution of wealth that is concentrated in just a few hands. In the resources allotted by the developed countries, a substantial part should be directed to that end. We call for monitoring systems agreed by consensus in international bodies. The United Nations Development Programme has a role to play in each country in this regard. This process should be more concrete, and we would like to express our willingness to participate actively in it.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that we will not have true governance without recognizing the role that should be played by local governments in their relationship with the social actors.

An urgent priority is to leave rhetoric behind and to start working together towards a sustainable future for environmentally sound urban areas, for the rights of the city. We need to understand that urban poverty must be included at the very core of the sustainability design. We need to give new meaning to solidarity in the international community.

The attitude of irresponsibility vis-à-vis social deterioration is the same attitude we see with respect to natural resources. Social inequality, racial, sexual and ethnic discrimination, the deterioration of the environment, the worsening of the quality of life of millions — all of these are symptoms of the same model. This is surely not a time to celebrate. It is a time when we call upon the Assembly to reflect very deeply on the retrogression facing us. This reflection must involve all actors involved in habitat, housing, neighbourhoods and cities.

This approach is being built throughout the world with the efforts of millions of men and women who continue to believe in the need to maintain dreams and idealism, to build new realities.

We shall continue in our struggle to bring about change, to create a more equitable and habitable world, to promote democratic, responsible governments and the protection the rights of individuals; and we shall continue to advocate the need to develop active citizenship, particularly for women, who have been underrepresented politically but who are active in daily social practices.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Andrew Kailembo, Secretary-General of the African Regional Organization of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

Mr. Kailembo (African Regional Organization of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions): The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has for many years contributed to the formulation and implementation of policies to improve human settlements in the context of sustainable development worldwide.

The ICFTU, together with the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers, strongly believes that effective implementation of the decisions of Habitat II is the key to bringing about a change. During the five years since Habitat II, many more have become homeless as a result of civil war, drought, famine and unsustainable development strategies adopted by many Governments in order to reduce poverty and unemployment.

The ICFTU is the world's largest international union, representing 155 million members in 148 countries represented by 221 affiliates. Its long-standing commitment is to secure social and economic justice for the poor and disadvantaged. Because of its composition, the ICFTU takes a global view of the eradication of poverty, promotion of employment and reduction of human suffering, and it campaigns for a global economic and social order to create a better habitat for all.

During Habitat II, the ICFTU reminded Governments to create and stimulate economic conditions so as to enable working people to afford

adequate housing. Access to adequate housing as a basic human right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In the context of review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the ICFTU and the international trade union movement believe that basic human freedoms and minimum rights to shelter, food and jobs are inseparable and pledge their support to measures that further these aims and, hence, to the success of this special session.

Rapid population growth poses one of the greatest challenges to the peoples of this planet. The implications of this for consumption, production, markets, education, services, the environment, investment and peace are thus fundamental to all of us. The world's population is urbanizing much faster than it is growing, in large measure because of shrinking economic opportunities and the lack of amenities available in rural areas.

Rising urbanization also brings us to the plight of rising exploitation of unorganized labour, child labour and forced and bonded labour. Trade unions demand protection of workers' basic human rights and an end to their exploitation. The bulk of these labourers in cities are workers who have migrated from rural areas for a better life.

The construction industry has enormous potential to become a major stimulus for economic growth and employment, but it requires a proper infrastructure for the adequate protection of workers' rights, especially for union organization. The ICFTU urges all Governments to respect the fundamental International Labour Organization (ILO) labour standards and the core ILO Conventions on Freedom of Association and on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. Trade unions demand that the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work be respected and guaranteed.

Governments should set up an urban poverty eradication fund to deal with growing urbanization, unemployment and homelessness, particularly among young workers. Community empowerment, sustainable support systems, skills-upgrading and employment generation must be addressed. Rural development programmes should become part of national planning in order to mitigate the pressures of urbanization. Carefully targeted public and private investment in infrastructure, including housing and land development, can provide low-cost quality housing. Housing banks, including scheduled banks, should be encouraged to provide low-interest loans. Suitable housing technology, adapted to locally available and environmentally friendly options with a touch of innovativeness should be developed and popularized. Housing cooperatives should be encouraged. Trade unions and other non-governmental organizations should be brought in to work in partnership with Governments, local authorities and the private sector on comprehensive shelter, infrastructure and rehabilitation programmes.

Women's empowerment must be strongly encouraged. The structures and institutions that perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality must be reformed, and women must be enabled to gain access to, and control of, both material and information resources. Measures are required, especially in developing countries, to increase women's ability to earn an adequate income so as to achieve economic self-reliance.

In addition to increasing development assistance, the industrialized world must open its markets to goods and services from developing countries.

This special session is an opportunity to ask for a definite commitment from countries to improve human settlements. The international trade union community hopes that the commitment to human rights espoused by many countries will include the right to human security, which implies the rights to work, food and nutrition, education, health and shelter for all. It is now time to show how committed national Governments and multilateral organizations are to addressing the urgent need for sustainable human settlements.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Sheila Patel, President of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, Asia Women and Shelter Network.

Ms. Patel (Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, Asia Women and Shelter Network): I welcome this opportunity and honour to be able to address the General Assembly today. I do so on behalf of a range of different organizations: primarily, for the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation, which are the three organizations working in India, in 40 cities, with a membership of

approximately 400,000 households. I also come here on behalf of Shack Dwellers International (SDI), a network of non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations working in 12 countries in Asia and Africa. Representatives from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Thailand and India who are present here for the events of this week. We are all here to examine and understand for ourselves how our Governments represent our interests in this Assembly. Some of us — those from Namibia and South Africa — are part of their Government delegations. This reflects the changing ways of this new millennium, in which partnerships of people's organizations and Governments have begun to represent interests in our countries.

Our cities already house many of our countries' very poor people, and we know this number will dramatically increase in the next few decades. Five years ago in Istanbul there was a strong commitment on the part of the international community and national Governments to help cities straddle the dual challenge of ensuring the development of cities — engines of our economic growth — with a commitment to equity and social justice for all. However, evidence from many cities around the world today suggests that most cities are still unable grapple with the increased numbers of their citizens who are housed in slums and in informal settlements. We must find a way out of this crisis.

Rather than waiting for Governments to do something for the poor, communities that are part of the SDI network and Federation members from all these countries seek to find solutions for themselves, hoping that their Governments will come to work in partnership with them. They have begun to find ways of housing themselves, of creating infrastructure that works for them. We know that for the poor these are the two most important safety nets for survival in cities today. As more and more poor people migrate into cities — and many of these people will be very poor — the responses of evictions, demolitions, denying communities the right to live in cities will become increasingly dysfunctional and retrograde. We hope that during this week we will see these approaches reduced dramatically and, in fact, stopped. What SDI member communities seek to do is to find solutions that work for cities and communities and to explore ways by which successes in some cities can be transferred rapidly to other cities.

Shack Dwellers International is a new and emerging organization typical of the changing world in which we live. Even very poor people today know the need for global connectivity. This organization, which is only five years old, has the potential to demonstrate many innovative practices in which both national and local governments and development agencies come to work in partnerships to make things work for cities in the future.

Knowledge is power in this millennium, and Federation members have begun to look at ways by which the information that they have gathered on behalf of their communities can become the basis for their dialogue with their Governments. Our message is that we want our Governments to remember that most of the housing stock in the world today is designed, constructed and financed by the poor themselves. Refining it incrementally, improving it and creating incentives to encourage communities to do better what they do already is the message for the future. Creating restrictions and barriers and making what they do illegal is dysfunctional.

Habitat is a people's agenda. Can national Governments and those committed to assisting in development support communities so as to achieve habitats that work for the poor? Or will all of us continue to see Governments drive the development agenda of Habitat and make communities the objects of development? We hope not.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Lara Bianco, Vice-President of the Women and Shelter Network, Latin American and Caribbean Region.

Ms. Bianco (Women and Shelter Network, Latin American and Caribbean Region) (*spoke in Spanish*): During the peace negotiations, Colombian women present at the public hearings held in San Vicente del Caguán in June last year said that what they wanted was to live, to dream and to die of old age. I will use that simple but powerful sentence to describe briefly the conclusions reached a few weeks ago in Bogotá by Latin American women from the Habitat International Coalition, the Women's Network for Peace and the Popular Education Network, which I am representing today.

What does it mean for women to live? Women do not just want to survive poverty, exclusion and conflict. Women are poor because we still do not have access to

services. We do not have access to, control over, or security with respect to the resources we need to live in conditions of dignity.

For every man whose life is spent in poverty, there are five women in the same condition. Seventy per cent of the 1.6 million people who live in deplorable living conditions are women, and it is estimated that women hold only 1 per cent of all property in the world.

Women are excluded from congresses and central and local governments. We are affected by conflicts and violence throughout our lives. We are unconditionally responsible for the well-being of the family — children, the elderly, the injured and victims of war — without any conditions or even a pat on the back, because "it is nothing".

In the year 2000, women held only 14 per cent of ministerial positions; only 14 per cent of the representatives of the lower chambers were women; only 15 per cent of representatives in the Senate and 7 per cent of mayors and local officials were women. In addition, women constitute between 60 and 70 per cent of the displaced population throughout the world.

It is for this reason that we have decided to be social actors ourselves. We are diverse agents of social change, reweaving the social fabric. We represent the most significant form of resistance to armed conflict, social violence and to the neo-liberal model and economic policies that assume that marginalization and hunger do not affect actual people, but exist only in models that allow solutions to be postponed.

What do women dream of? We have a long way to go, but we women and men of today can make sure that our girls and boys can enjoy the rights that the Habitat Agenda calls for: the right of women to have rights; to have access to, control over and security of housing, land and property; equal participation in decision-making at all levels; and the right to live without violence. For this reason, we urge Governments to become aware of the setbacks and the fact that the principles set out in the Habitat Agenda have not been put into practice — principles that are indispensable to ensure the quality of life that we want and demand.

We dream of sustainable cities that are equitable for women — cities whose houses offer the real possibility of a high quality of life. We want to own houses, or at least to be certain that we could not be evicted by conflict, the government or a husband — whether or not this is recognized by the law — or by our in-laws. We dream of cities in which we have the right to walk freely, to have rights, to express opinions and to participate in the decisions that are the most important for us and for our communities and for future generations. We dream of cities that have been designed for us, in which we can work on an equal footing with men, where we can be sure that in our absence our girls and boys will be cared for properly, because the Government has devoted resources to provide quality care and education for the youngest generation.

The President returned to the Chair.

We women want to die of old age, because there will not be any more conflicts or weapons to kill us and because the money that governments will have saved on military expenditures will be used for education, health and housing programmes.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Yasemin Uyar, Vice-President of Youth for Habitat.

Ms. Uyar (Youth for Habitat): My name is Yasemin Uyar. I am from Turkey, and I represent Youth for Habitat International, which is a non-governmental, non-profit, open-ended international youth network. Established in 1995 with the participation of over 200 youth organizations from diverse backgrounds, the network has been working on raising awareness about the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21, together with promoting youth perspectives in their implementation.

Youth and children constitute more than half of the world's population. Living in mostly urban areas, they represent one of the largest groups that is adversely affected by unsustainable urban development patterns. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that youth, with their energy, creativity, idealism and passion, have the potential to help overcome the problems we face today and will face tomorrow.

Despite the fact that youth are accepted as key partners for implementation of the Habitat Agenda, youth participation in decision-making processes has not been effective enough. We call upon all Governments and other partners to intensify their efforts to enhance the role of youth in decision-making processes. Cooperation between youth, civil society organizations and governments at all levels should be

further developed through the establishment and support of youth councils or parliaments.

In order to ensure the broad participation of youth, governance should be made attractive to young people. We, as young people, are aware that there is still a substantial lack of understanding among youth about Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21. We realize that in order to develop and maintain a liveable environment for current and future generations, it is important to raise awareness among youth about this critical issue of sustainable development. There is also a need to develop a dialogue between youth and governments, so as to raise awareness among governmental bodies and institutions on youth issues. We believe that this would allow our governments to realistically address the concerns and problems of young people and to create an environment in which the true potential of young people could be seen and appreciated.

We are deeply concerned that the Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium does not refer in a substantial way to the concepts of sustainability and intergenerational justice. It fails to acknowledge the rights and interests of today's youth and of future generations. We have the impression that the Istanbul spirit of accepting youth as a key partner for achieving the Habitat goals is weakening.

On the occasion of this special session, we as young people would like to remind our Governments of the promises they made during the Habitat II Conference and to call upon them to fulfil their commitments to the youth-related articles of the Habitat Agenda. We want to bring to the attention of Governments the fact that principle 21 of the Rio Declaration and paragraph 120 of the Habitat Agenda emphasize the importance of enabling youth to play an active and creative role in building sustainable human settlements. It is important that the role of young people in creating sustainable livelihoods is fully acknowledged, and that mechanisms to utilize their full potential are established.

As young people, we recognize our role in creating sustainable human settlements and commit ourselves to fulfilling our responsibilities. We ask our fellow Governments, as our mentors and our partners, to join in our efforts to achieve this goal.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda items 8, 9 and 10.

I shall now give the floor to those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): I want to speak in exercise of my right of reply in connection with the statement made by the representative of Armenia in the closing moments of the 4th plenary meeting yesterday.

First of all, I am obliged to thank him for his highlighting the conflict in and around the Nagorny Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and for his referring to the huge amount of damage and destruction in the territories that belong to my country. Obviously, everybody knows that this was the result not of a natural disaster, but of a military invasion of the sovereign Azerbaijani State. In this context, I fully endorse his words that the international community is well aware of who is the real aggressor.

Moreover, the matter of the occupied Azerbaijani territories was addressed in Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), which unequivocally reconfirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from all the occupied territories.

As for the consistence of this problem with the mandate of this special session, it is regrettable that the Armenian representative is a bit misled in his understanding of the matter. It goes without saying that the Habitat Agenda would be unobtainable without peace being restored in each and every region of the world. Azerbaijan stands for just and lasting peace in the region, but not by neglecting its highest national interests. Therefore, the truth should not be ignored.

In his statement at the opening of the Key West proximity talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairmanship, in Florida on 3 April this year, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Heydar Aliyev, said:

> "Having occupied Nagorny Karabakh, the Armenian armed forces expanded military operations beyond the Nagorny Karabakh region and occupied, in addition, seven major administrative districts of Azerbaijan.

> "In this way, by 1993 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan had been seized and is still under occupation by the Armenian armed forces. Everything has been destroyed, pillaged and obliterated in this territory. More than 900 large and small towns, approximately 600 schools, 250 medical institutions, and all museums and historical and cultural monuments have been destroyed.
>
> "During the conflict, 30,000 Azerbaijani citizens perished; more than 200,000 were wounded and became invalids; and thousands were captured, seized as hostages and are missing. About 1 million Azerbaijanis, which represents every eighth citizen of the country, have lost their land, and this is the ninth year in which they have been living in tents under intolerably difficult conditions. A new generation has grown up in these tents." (*A/56/62, p. 3*)

Addressing the immediate subject of our discussion at this special session — cities and settlements — I would like to familiarize the members of this body with the destiny of one of the occupied cities of Azerbaijan: the city of Agdam.

On 27 May 2001, the New York Times newspaper cited Ambassador Carey Cavanaugh, American co-Chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group dealing with the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Speaking on the current status of that occupied city, he gave a clear-cut but killing description: "It was turned into the largest Home Depot on the planet." This is a diplomatic wrapping of the fact that this Azerbaijani city has been completely looted and pillaged to the last window frame, to the last building stone, to the last door hinge and nail by Armenians.

Mr. Kocharian (Armenia): We are obliged to speak for the second time in exercise of our right of reply and once again to reiterate our position on the issue raised by the Azerbaijani delegation.

As has been expressed by high-ranking officials of my country on different occasions, Armenia stands for a comprehensive settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group, with the participation of all interested parties. As to the United Nations resolutions mentioned here, I would like just to clarify the fact that they make no mention of Armenia.

We regret that the Azerbaijani delegation has once again demonstrated an absence of political will, reinforcing distrust and animosity towards Armenia, and callously misinterprets its own role and responsibility for the final solution of the Nagorny Karabakh issue. Unfortunately, the falsification of real facts has become the very usual style and behaviour for Azerbaijan in various forums.

As was mentioned in the statement made by the head of our delegation at the special session on human settlements, as a consequence of the ongoing blockade imposed by Azerbaijan, the numerous problems of people deported from that country have not been solved. Hundreds of thousands of our compatriots left their property, houses and savings in Azerbaijan and have not received any compensation. Armenians left more than 92,000 houses and flats in Azerbaijan. The majority of our compatriots did not get any compensation from the Azerbaijani Government. In its turn, the Armenian Government demonstrated good will and allocated in compensation $110 million to those Azerbaijanis who left Armenia.

As was mentioned yesterday, as a result of the aggression of Azerbaijan, thousands of houses, medical and educational centres, roads and water pipes were ruined and damaged. The Government of Armenia has recently approved projects on housing for people who suffered in the inter-ethnic conflict from 1988 to 1992 and on the post-conflict rehabilitation of border territories of the Republic of Armenia. The main goals of the projects are resettlement and rehabilitation for thousands of displaced persons who were forcibly moved from their land following the occupation by Azerbaijan of the Artsvashen region and for the more than 300,000 refugees who became victims of the inter-ethnic conflict.

The right to adequate housing is stipulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My Government continues to pay serious attention to the subject and we are here to find solutions to the problem of providing adequate housing and to strengthen international cooperation in human settlements and sustainable development-related issues. In this context, we would like strongly to recommend to our Azerbaijani colleagues that they concentrate more on the agenda of this important session and make their positive contribution to our work.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): Once again, the Armenian representative has made an attempt to mislead the General Assembly. Let me offer just one example. Before me is the text of Security Council resolution 822 (1993), which reads in part as follows:

> "The Security Council,
>
> "...
>
> "Expressing its serious concern at the deterioration of the relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan". (*Third preambular paragraph*)

That is a clear example of a reference to Armenia as part of the conflict in a United Nations, specifically a Security Council document. Moreover, in General Assembly resolution 49/13 of 1994, a similar formulation was used.

The President: The General Assembly will now hear an oral presentation by the Chairman of the Thematic Committee, His Excellency Mr. Slaheddine Belaid of Tunisia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Belaid (Tunisia), Chairman of the Thematic Committee (*spoke in French*): It has been an honour and a privilege for me to serve as Chairman of the Thematic Committee at this special session on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Establishing that Committee was a major innovation in the work of the General Assembly, and I think I can say that the Committee did its work to perfection and fully achieved its goal: to provide a selective, inductive history of human settlements and the implementation of the Habitat Agenda since the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul.

The Committee heard excellent presentations that provided concrete examples of how the Habitat Agenda was being implemented in 16 countries from all regions. Our discussions were on a very high level, and were very lively. During our first meeting, on housing and basic services, we were able to see how, by means of substantial public investment complementing community participation, South Africa's housing policy was implementing the constitutional right to adequate shelter. We considered Egypt's large-scale social housing programmes and the development strategies devised by some Egyptian cities such as Luxor and Ismailia. Those strategies recognize the key role of community partners and of the private sector. We studied the integrated programme for improvements in poor areas of Medellín, Colombia, and the programme to rebuild housing in Dakar, Senegal.

On the question of access to basic services, we heard about the determined work of Indian non-governmental organizations in providing adequate health services in poor areas of Bombay, Bangalore and Pune.

We saw that the primary goal of the Habitat Agenda, adequate shelter for all, was more than a mere slogan. Both through improvements in existing neighbourhoods and through the construction of new housing units, that goal is now being pursued in many countries.

At our second meeting, we saw how cities as different as Dar-es-Salaam, Stockholm, Chengdu and Katowice had since 1996 been engaged in determined efforts to improve the urban environment. We noted impressive success and effective implementation of the fundamental principles of the Habitat Agenda through integrated participatory management of the local environment.

In Dar-es-Salaam, the authorities are working with residents to ensure the sustainability of the city, by tangibly improving the population's living conditions. The lessons learned are now being shared with other cities throughout the country.

For its part, Stockholm is aiming to increase the density of its urban fabric and to improve its public transportation network in order to ensure that development is in harmony with the environment.

In China, Chengdu has completely renewed its environment through its project for the rivers Fu and Nan. To contribute to the worldwide attempt to reduce harmful emissions and to promote the exchange of experiences in that area, Chengdu organized a day without motor vehicles during a preparatory meeting for Istanbul + 5, which focused on best practices.

Poland's city of Katowice has made concerted and intercommunal efforts to reduce air and water pollution, of which it had been a victim during and after the exploitation of the region's lead and zinc mines.

Our third meeting was devoted to a subject that has taken on greater importance in recent years: urban governance. We saw that countries in both the South

and the North were trying to improve urban governance. Very interesting lessons could already be drawn from the experiences of both those groups of countries. In Santo André and Brasilia, Brazil, the local authorities have undertaken ambitious social integration programmes, involving the inhabitants themselves even in budgetary decision-making.

In Lyon, France, local communities have undertaken a strategic approach entitled Millennium Three; this has provided that urban area with a plan for comprehensive sustainable development. That approach is based on promoting public debate among all elements of civil society, and on consideration of the future role of the urban regions and of the institutional structures that will be needed to ensure more harmonious urban development.

Nigeria is a federal country made up of 36 states and 774 local governments; since 1999, it has been reviewing its legislation to encourage participation, eradicate corruption and promote good governance. Last April, the Government launched a national campaign on good urban governance, with the support of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

The dynamism of the city of Barcelona, Spain's second largest city, stems from vigorous partnerships between the public and private sectors and from a systematic decentralization of responsibilities and resources. That decentralization employs the principle of subsidiarity, which should be at the centre of any decentralization policy.

All these experiences illustrate that the Istanbul commitments on urban governance have not remained a dead letter. Even if we do not yet have a single and common definition of good governance, it does not mean that one does not exist in practice.

Our last gathering dealt with the multi-sectoral theme of the eradication of poverty, and specifically with its urban and housing dimensions. We also had an opportunity to study cases from three different continents.

The example of Thailand clarified for us the importance of financial incentives and of partnerships between Governments and community organizations. Thailand's Community Development Fund grants loans to enable less advantaged people to break the vicious cycle of poverty.

In Peru, the municipality of Villa El Salvador has developed a long-term development plan that closely involves non-governmental organizations representing the inhabitants of poor districts and other poor people. The municipality has also taken a participatory approach to its budget.

For its part, Morocco initiated a pilot project in 1998 to reduce urban poverty in the cities of Casablanca, Marrakesh and Tangier. This project involves numerous partners from the local, national and international levels. Morocco will also be organizing next October an international forum on urban poverty that will draw lessons from international experience in this field, both from the North and the South.

I have attempted briefly to summarize the work of the Thematic Committee, the first of its kind in the history of United Nations special sessions. I have certainly not given a full account of the full range of the debates it held, of the quality of films and videos shown to it or of the dynamic character of the presenters who came before it. I ask that the ministers, mayors, leaders of non-governmental organizations and facilitators who contributed to our Committee excuse the brevity of my summary. Those persons did a fantastic job from which all of us benefited. They also illustrated once again that the United Nations is the best forum for an exchange of experiences and good practices. I thank them all for their excellent collective effort. I also wish to thank all those who spoke in the Committee for making it a success and for facilitating the tasks of the Bureau thanks to their seriousness and professionalism.

In closing, I wish to congratulate the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for bringing together a very well-balanced Thematic Committee in such a short time and in such a masterful way. That balance was evident in the issues taken up, in the countries included and in those making presentations.

I would like to conclude by expressing the wish that the work of our Committee will lead to the formulation of a synthesis that not only will preserve this excellent work but that will, above all, provide relevant documents to all the Habitat partners from which they will be able to benefit in the drafting and implementation of their national agendas. I am certain that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements will find the necessary resources to make that possible,

thereby usefully completing the wonderful series of publications and reports we have received this week.

The President: In view of the fact that the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole has not yet completed its work, I shall now suspend this meeting, which will resume after the conclusion of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole. The time for the resumption of the plenary meeting will be announced later; I hope it can be announced in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

The meeting was suspended at 6.20 p.m. and was resumed at 6.40 a.m. on Saturday, 9 June 2001.

Agenda items 8, 9, 10 *(continued)* **and agenda item 11**

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session (A/S-25/7)

Adoption of the final document

The President: I request the Rapporteur of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session, Mr. Alireza Esmaeilzadeh of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to introduce the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Esmaeilzadeh (Islamic Republic of Iran), Rapporteur of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session: I have the honour to present the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session, which is contained in the following documents: A/S-25/AC.1/L.1 and addenda 1 to 5, and A/S-25/AC.1/L.2.

As the Assembly will recall, the Ad Hoc Committee was responsible for finalizing a document for consideration by this special session entitled "Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium". The Ad Hoc Committee devoted two meetings to a general discussion of the three agenda items allocated to the Ad Hoc Committee and devoted a third meeting and a number of informal consultations and exchanges of views on the document.

I should like to take this opportunity to conclude the report by adding information that is not included in the printed documents before the Assembly.

As concerns document A/S-25/AC.1/L.1, the word "three" is to be inserted into the first blank space in paragraph 2, and "8 and 9" inserted into the second blank space, before the word "June". In paragraph 14, "9" is to be inserted into the blank space before "June".

The following paragraph should be added after paragraph 14:

> "At its third meeting, on 8 June, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole considered its draft report (A/S-25/AC.1/L.1 and addenda 1), and one draft resolution submitted by the Chairman in document A/S-25/AC.1/L.2. Statements were made by the representatives of: ...".

Turning to document A/S-25/AC.1/L.1/Add.1, in paragraph 1, insert "3rd" in the first blank space and "9" in the second blank space.

Turning to document A/S-25/AC.1/L.1/Add.2, in paragraph 1, insert "3rd" in the first blank space and "9" in the second blank space.

In document A/S-25/AC.1/L.1/Add.3, in paragraph 1, insert "3rd" in the first blank space and "9" in the second blank space.

In document A/S-25/AC.1/L.1/Add.4, the subtitle "Introduction" should be deleted in addenda 3 and 4.

A new document, A/S-25/AC.1/L.1/Add.5, contains the chapeau for the draft declaration, which includes paragraph 1 of the draft declaration as contained in document A/S-25/2. Therefore, in the declaration, the former paragraph 2 will become paragraph 1, and the following paragraphs will be renumbered accordingly.

Three new paragraphs were presented and adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee: paragraph 53 bis, 53 ter and 53 quater.

In document A/S-25/AC.1/L.1, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft report to which is annexed the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, as orally revised.

The President: If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the Assembly will not discuss the report.

It was so decided.

The President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session have been made clear in the Committee. May I remind delegations that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session in document A/S-25/AC.1/L.2.

The draft resolution is entitled "Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium". The text of the annex to the draft resolution is contained, for the time being, in document A/S-25/2, as amended by documents A/S-25/AC.1/L.1.

The draft resolution was recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-Fifth Special Session for adoption.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-25/2).

The President: I shall now give the floor to those representatives who wish to make statements in explanation of position.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): It is in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill, and because of our commitment to the success of the Habitat Conference, that Israel has decided to join the consensus on the Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium.

My delegation welcomes the inclusion in the text of a paragraph regarding international terrorism. As witnessed just a week ago in my own country, in the city of Tel-Aviv, terrorism in populated areas — indeed, anywhere — is an issue of international concern. The international community should indeed take concerted action against this heinous crime.

I should like, however, to place on record our reservations with regard to paragraphs 53 bis, 53 ter and 53 quater.

In conclusion, we would like to express to you, Mr. President, our appreciation for your wise and able leadership.

Mr. Southwick (United States of America): I take the floor to give an explanation of position.

The United States is pleased to join the consensus on the Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. We worked hard to achieve consensus, because we believe that the mission of Habitat is very important. While pleased with the substantive outcome of this conference document, including the reference to terrorism, we regret very much that, once again, a United Nations conference on an important thematic matter has been politicized, robbing the conference of its focus and unjustifiably consuming an enormous amount of time. We hope that, working together, we can somehow in future find a better way to do business.

In closing, let me express my sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, for your steadfast, imaginative and dedicated efforts to achieve consensus. Let no one be in doubt that the success of this session is due to your efforts.

Mr. Gamaleidin (Egypt): My delegation would like to express its deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for all of the efforts you have made to get us to this successful conclusion and for your personal involvement in achieving this result. We would like simply to place on record that the reservation expressed by the delegation of Egypt in Istanbul regarding the paragraph on the various forms of family is still valid with respect to the current Declaration.

Mr. Al-Badi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on having concluded this special session on the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II.

The delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should like to reiterate the reservations that it expressed at the Istanbul Conference, at which a text was presented to the Chairman. We reserve our position on the items that contradict the precepts of Islam and the laws of Saudi Arabia.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote.

I call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I would like to express my delegation's deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for the efforts you personally have made in connection with the adoption of this important Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium, which has now been adopted by consensus. Naturally, I should like also to extend our great appreciation to the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the efforts that he made.

We are pleased with what has been done to date. We welcome the fact that the General Assembly has been successful in dealing with these issues, and we are gratified that all of this has been achieved by consensus, thanks to the intensive efforts made by several Member States.

In this connection, we must extend our sincerest thanks to the Group of 77 and China and its Chairman for the significant amount of work done and for their tireless efforts.

Let me also thank you, Mr. President, and all of those who have made a contribution to our attaining this significant achievement, which will now guide our activities in the coming years.

The President: I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Mirafzal (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am taking the floor to thank you, Sir, and the other members of the Bureau, as well as the bureau of the Committee of the Whole, whose members have done a very good job in leading the process to this moment.

I should like in particular, on behalf of the Group of 77, to thank you, Sir, for your personal efforts in bringing this session to a successful conclusion. It was a collective effort, but certainly it was your prominent role that brought us to that successful conclusion. Once again, I thank you on behalf of the Group of 77 and wish you a very good and healthy life.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of agenda items 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Closing statement by the President

The President: Let me reiterate my sincere thanks to all for their hard work in the five-year review of the Habitat Agenda. I am particularly delighted and pleased by the constructive and cooperative spirit that has prevailed throughout the special session and during the very difficult negotiations on the Declaration document.

I should also like to express my thanks to the able Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, Ambassador Garcia Duran, who had to leave before the conclusion of our discussion. My thanks are also due to the bureaus of the Committee of the Whole and of the Thematic Committee.

We had a difficult task, but we did well. At this late hour, I shall refrain from making a long speech and I wish all members a nice weekend.

We have now come to the end of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly. May I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Closure of the session

The President: I declare closed the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 7.10 a.m.